pears to be in excess of the optimum level. The need for improvement of the performance of the State Electricity Boards has been stressed to the States, time and again, in various forums of discussions, suggesting steps like equity participation by the State Government, provision of specific grants to meet the losses for supply of power to the agricultural sector, periodical revision of tariff, improving the performance of generating stations, reducing Transmission and Distribution losses, so that they could at least earn the statutory minimum return of 3 per cent.

Withdrawal of Private Drilling Companies from ONGC Operations

34. DR. NARREDDY THULASI REDDY: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the private drilling companies on contract with ONGC are contemplating to withdraw from drilling operations;

(b) if so, what are the names of the companies which have withdrawn/propose to withdraw from the drilling operations;

(c) what are the reasons therefor;

(d) what is the estimated crude oil production likely to come down as a consequence thereof;

(e) the estimated quantity (with cost in foreign exchange) that would be required to import in order to meet the difference in production; and

(f) what steps have been taken by Government to resolve the impasse with the private drilling companies?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI B. SHANKARANAND): (a) to (c) No company on contract for drilling services has withdrawn nor has any intimation been received from them in this regard.

(d) to (f) Do not arise.

DESU Losing Crores Every Month

35. SHRI HARVENDRA SINGH HANSPAL: Will the Minister of POWER AND NON-CONVENTIONAL ENERGY SOURCES be pleased to state:

(a) whether the attention of Government have been drawn to a news-item captioned "DESU losing crores every month" as reported in the 'Indian Express' of the 9th August, 1991;

(b) if so, whether the DESU has changed its billing system from bi-monthly to four monthly meter reading system;

(c) whether it is a fact that due to four monthly meter reading system, the consumption of energy is mostly misused by unscrupulous consumers; and

(d) if so, what steps Government propose to take to rectify the situations?

THE MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) OF THE MINISTRY OF POWER AND NON-CONVENTIONAL ENERGY SOURCES (SHRI KALP NATH RAI): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Under the present system of DESU, bills to the domestic consumers are sent on bi-monthly basis and to the non-domestic/industrial consumers on monthly basis. A bill on actual meter reading basis is prepared every four months and a bill on provisional basis is sent in between for two months based on past consumption in the case of domestic consumers. The system of four monthly meter reading has been adopted by DESU due to the shortage of Meter Readers.

(c) According to DESU, the system of four monthly reading of meters in respect of domestic consumers does not specifically lead to misuse of energy as a Four-digit Meter can record

consumption upto 9999 units which a domestic consumer is not likely to exceed in a period of four months.

(d) Does not arise in view of reply to part (c) of the question.

Laying of Underground Transmission Lines by DESU

36. SHRI HARVENDRA SINGH HANSPAL: Will the Minister of POWER AND NON-CONVENTIONAL ENERGY SOURCES be pleased to state:

(a) whether the DESU propose to remove all the overhead transmission lines and to lay them underground to prevent theft, breakdown, etc. of power;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof;

(c) by when the work of laying underground transmission lines would begin; and

(d) the areas in which the work is to be completed during the current financial year?

THE MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) OF THE MINISTRY OF POWER AND NON-CONVENTIONAL ENERGY SOURCES (SHRI KALP NATH RAI): (a) to (c) In view of the enormous expenditure involved and the resource constraints, DESU has no proposal for the present to convert the existing overhead system to underground system.

(d) Does not arise in view of answer to parts (a) to (c) of the question.

Coal Production in the Country

37. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) what was the coal production in the country during the last six months up to the 31st July, 1991 as compared to corresponding period last year;

(b) what were the despatches of coal during the same period indicating the increase in million tonnes and also percentage wise to defferent sectors *i.e.* power, steel, etc. in the country; and

(c) what further steps Government have taken or proposed to take to increased production of coal during the current year as compared to last two years in the country?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRI S. B. NYAMAGOUDAR): (a) Coal production in the country during February-July 1990 and February-July 1991 was 101.06 million tonnes and 113.8 million tonnes respectively.

(b) The information is given below:—

(million tonnes)

Sector	Despatches (including washerymiddlings)			
	Feb—July, 1990	Feb—July, 1991	Increase	% age increase
Power	60·33	65·10	+4·77	+7·9
Steel	11·52	12·80	+1·28	+18·1
Cement	4·45	3·01	+0·36	+7·7
Others	25·40	28·47	+3.07	+12·1
TOTAL	101·90	111·38	+9·48	+9·3